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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KAMPALA 000045

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SUBJECT: UGANDA: AMBASSADOR CREDENTIALIALED; GETS EARFUL ON
ANTI-HOMOSEXUALITY BILL

REF: 09 KAMPALA 01276

CLASSIFIED BY: Aaron Sampson, Pol/Econ Chief; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1.(C) Summary: After four months in-country, Ambassador Lanier presented his credentials to President Museveni on January 24. In the meeting that followed, Museveni spoke only of Uganda's draft anti-homosexuality bill. Museveni said that the bill's provisions condemning consenting homosexual adults to life imprisonment or death are "unacceptable," and that the bill will be significantly amended or perhaps shelved completely. The President stressed that he is handling the issue and urged the U.S. to give him space to deal with the legislation internally. Museveni's comments echoed those of Foreign Minister Sam Kutesa, who told the Ambassador on January 21 that the bill will likely "die a natural death." End Summary.

Museveni Comments on Anti-Homosexuality Bill

12. (C) Ambassador Lanier was credentialialed on January 24 along with recently arrived Ambassadors from Belgium, Rwanda, Iran, and Algeria. Museveni and Investment Minister Aston Kajara received the Ambassador's letter of credence at State House. In the meeting that followed, Museveni spoke of one topic only: Uganda's draft anti-homosexuality bill. Museveni seemed to be talking to his own people as much as to Ambassador Lanier when explaining his views on the legislation and confirming that he is in control of the situation. Museveni spent a considerable amount of time commenting on cultural differences between the West and Africa and said that Africans do not regard homosexuality as a human rights issue. Museveni appeared to feign ignorance of the bill's most offensive provisions - particularly the death penalty and imprisonment for not reporting homosexuals to authorities - after they were highlighted by the Ambassador and confirmed by Minister Kajara.

13. (C) Museveni made it clear that Uganda will not further criminalize homosexual sex between consenting adults and that the provision on reporting homosexuals to authorities would also not go through. He suggested the entire bill could be dropped, and twice asked the Ambassador to remind Washington that "someone in Uganda", meaning himself, is handling the matter and knows what he is doing. He also emphasized that Uganda's main concern is alleged advocacy and recruitment of homosexuals, and that homosexuality between consenting adults has previously been quietly tolerated in Uganda.

14. (C) The President twice referred to a recent local political

cartoon depicting him on this issue as a puppet of Secretary Clinton, Prime Minister Gordon Brown, and Stephen Harper, and asked international donors to stand down to give him room to deal with the anti-homosexuality legislation in his own way. On the way out of the meeting, and in the presence of the Ambassador and Foreign Minister Kutesa only, Museveni directed Kutesa to arrange a private meeting with the Ambassador in February to further discuss the anti-homosexuality bill.

15. (C) Museveni's comments expand on those made on January 21 by Foreign Minister Kutesa, who told the Ambassador that Cabinet discussed the legislation on January 20 and that some members, like Kajara, pushed to withdraw the bill while others led by Ethics Minister Buturo advocated for a watered down version. Kutesa described the bill's author, David Bahati, as "bent" on pushing the bill through Parliament, and said Cabinet created a sub-committee chaired by the Attorney General to review the legislation and formulate a government position. Kutesa said "our position is that it will die a natural death."

Comment: Giving Museveni Space

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16. (C) The President's message for the U.S. and other donors could not be clearer: tone down public statements against the bill to give Museveni the political space he needs to kill the legislation in his own way. The President indicated that statements of condemnation from the international community are rendering this task more difficult by fueling the anti-imperialist rhetoric of those pushing the bill, and that if the international community forces his hand, he will side with the vast majority of Ugandans who favor the bill without necessarily understanding its implications.
LANIER